

# The Benefits of Fluoride

Fluoride is a natural element found in rocks, soil, and water. It is added to things like toothpaste to keep tooth enamel strong and to prevent tooth decay.

Frequent use of small amounts of fluoride products, including water, offers the most benefit to teeth. For most people, this means drinking water with optimal fluoride in it and brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.

## Sources of Fluoride

### Water

Drinking and using water with optimal amounts of fluoride (0.7 to 1.2 parts per million) is safe, effective, and inexpensive. The fluoride levels of Iowa's public water systems are available online at [www.idph.state.ia.us/hpcdp/fluoride\\_search.asp](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/hpcdp/fluoride_search.asp).

Kits to analyze the level of fluoride in private water systems in Iowa are available from the University Hygienic Laboratory. Call (515)725-1600 for more information.

Bottled water may or may not have fluoride. Some bottle labels show the fluoride content, but it is not required. For questions about a particular brand, contact the manufacturer.



### Toothpaste

Using fluoride toothpaste is an easy way to make teeth stronger. For children between ages 2 and 6 years old, parents must help with brushing and use only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste.

Before using fluoride toothpaste for children younger than 2 years old, parents should talk to a health care professional. They can decide if the child has risk factors for tooth decay that would indicate the need for fluoride toothpaste.

### Varnish

Fluoride varnish applications are available through health care professionals. It is particularly useful for very young children, people with special health needs, and older adults.

Fluoride varnish is easily and quickly applied to teeth and because it hardens on the teeth, very little fluoride is swallowed. The hardened form also allows the fluoride to absorb into the tooth for several hours after being applied.

